

The Other Film Festival Consultations

Executive Summary



In December 2014 the festival reached its 10th year, with five festivals being held since the inaugural event in December 2004.

After a decade of growing in scope, challenging the film industry and engaging audiences, Arts Access Victoria believed it was an appropriate time to reflect on the festival's achievements, and undertake a strategic review to determine the festival's future path.

We particularly wanted to know what the festival meant to the community, and what they wanted to see in its future.

As part of the strategic review a focus group and a community consultation session were hosted by the Other Film Festival, with feedback also received from individuals through other channels.

Focus Group

A focus group was held in June 2015, with participants who held a close relationship with the festival in varying capacities.

Central Themes

Participants were asked to discuss a range of questions. The key themes that arose from these discussions were the following:

- The festival is a place of celebration and belonging for audience members with disabilities. There was a strong attachment by people with disabilities to the festival which was identified as one of only a handful of events that expressed their aspirations for an inclusive and egalitarian society.
- There is a strong need to provide the community with a sense of ownership of the festival, both in relation to programming, profiling, community engagement and in it the choice of venue. This includes a more targeted audience engagement strategy to open the festival to new audiences and strengthen links to existing patrons.
- The programming to-date was commended for its ability to make people question their perspectives and values. The festival content was seen as compelling, high quality and transformative. The content has the potential to subvert notions of disability by portraying stories of disability that are not readily offered to audiences.
- The festival needs to provide more support and exposure for emerging filmmakers with disabilities, as well as pathways to employment for filmmakers, through its industry connections. This was seen as a significant weakness of the festival, although respondents understood that capacity was an issue for festival staff.

- The festival needs to be more targeted with the impact it has, both thematically and at a community level. One recurring suggestion was that a series of shorter events be held regularly (i.e. one evening of screenings once every month focusing on a specific theme), with a main few-days long event taking place once a year, or biennially.

Community Consultation

The Other Film Festival community consultation was attended by 40 participants. These participants ranged from individuals who had attended each festival since the first event in 2004 to people who were newcomers and had never attended a festival event. The objective of the consultation was to discuss the future of the festival and generate discussion about the festival's format and goals. The consultation was followed by a short screening of highlights from past festival programs.

Consultation facilitator: Christine Mathieson

Group discussion facilitators: Sophie Sherriff, Kate Hood, Leisa Prowd, Nikki Zerella, Fiona Tuomy and Mija Gwyn

A snapshot of the festival from 2004 to 2014 was shown, detailing the changes in audience numbers, funding and budgets over the 10 years since the inaugural festival.

This was followed by group discussions, with the group facilitators reporting back on the main themes raised at their tables.

Central Themes

- The festival is, and should continue to be a place of celebration where everyone feels welcome.
- The festival's commitment to exemplary access and inclusion is a draw card that must be maintained at the heart of the festival.
- The festival has the capacity to "future proof" the social reforms currently happening in the disability sector. Where else can we see a visible manifestation of our aspirations for a fully inclusive society than in through the imagination of film makers?
- We need to increase engagement with 'mainstream' audiences so that the social change objectives of the festival can be more fully realised.
- Partnering with other organisations and festivals can give us access to new audiences while supporting their access and inclusion.
- The festival should continue to have a strong and independent brand, but that should not prohibit close partnerships.
- We need to increase engagement with different audiences by using more social media engagement, a more effective marketing strategy and a process of ongoing feedback to keep stakeholders engaged.

- The format of the festival needs to incorporate a touring program, and have a more frequent screening schedule throughout the year, with the main event being shorter and having more impact.
- Increase locally-made content to build better pathways for emerging film makers with disabilities.
- Increase partnerships and connections across the local film and art sectors to allow for better advocacy and sharing of knowledge of screen sector accessibility.
- Use the screening program as a training tool for the screen industry.
- Establish and advocate protocols for working with and representing people with disabilities in the screen industry (i.e. authentic casting).
- Explore digital platforms for the festival to increase accessibility for audience members who may find it difficult to physically travel to the festival location.
- Think creatively about the issue of venue accessibility. If we don't have accessible cinemas that meet our needs, how can we create spaces in unconventional places, such as outdoors?

Similar themes emerged at both the focus group and the community consultation, with a strong emphasis on the festival needing to retain and strengthen its role as a community meeting point. It was unanimously agreed that the main festival program needed to be shorter and more concentrated, more “bolder” with a wider range of events programmed throughout the year.

Recommendations for 2016

- **Deliver the main festival event as a 3-day program of outdoor screenings** in partnership with Twilight Cinema, and partner with Fringe Festival to deliver the festival as a stream of Fringe Festival. This will increase our engagement with audiences who may have little prior exposure to film and arts projects created by, or led by, people with disabilities. As always, our focus will also be on the provision of exemplary access and inclusion, and where possible, trialling of new and emerging access technologies.
- **The program will have 5 principal elements:**
 - A limited screening of new cinema by, with and about people with disability as part of our outdoor experience (300 minutes)
 - Curated catalogue of highlights from past festival programs, delivered as an individual personalised screening experience
 - A showcase of films by, about and for the Deaf community
 - A masterclass, panel and talk led by a Deaf guest from the US, funded by the US Embassy
 - A showcase of the work of local emerging filmmakers with disabilities
- **The 2016 program will focus on the Deaf community and culture.** A different theme will be selected for each festival year. In 2016 The Other Film Festival will partner

with Turquoise Australia, a volunteer-based group that coordinates film and performing arts events in the Deaf community. Support has been provided by U.S. Consulate General to invite a Deaf festival guest from the US.

- **Deliver a curated catalogue of highlights from past festival programs.** This will be made available for on-demand 'individual' screening pods inside Arts Access Victoria's portable arts studio, Nebula. The catalogue will feature highlights from past festival programs. The screening pods will be made open to festival visitors, so they are able to create their own individualised viewing experience, and peruse the films at their own pace. All films are captioned and audio-described. Filmmakers and critics will be invited to 'host' screenings, which will be followed by intimate conversations in Nebula that are thematically tied to the content that has been viewed.
- **Showcase the work of local emerging filmmakers.** A stream in the festival program will showcase short films (up to 5 mins in length) produced by local filmmakers with disabilities. This will increase engagement with the community, and give the community a sense of ownership.
- **Develop and implement an ambassador scheme** for the festival to increase engagement with a wider range of audiences and partners, including screen culture organisations. The ambassadors will represent a range of communities and groups. They will act as two-way conduits between these communities and the festival, participating in a reference group to provide feedback from their communities about the festival and promoting festival events within their communities.